

Camp Butler National Cemetery  
5063 Camp Butler Road  
Springfield, Illinois 62707

## Description

The Camp Butler National Cemetery, established in 1862, is located at the intersection of U. S. Highway No. 36 and Sangamon Avenue, six miles northeast of Springfield, in Sangamon County. In 1949, the wall enclosing the west and south boundaries of the cemetery was constructed, as well as the main entry gate. The wall has a concrete base, six to twelve inches high, brick piers, and iron fencing between piers. The main entrance is situated at the center of the south side and is protected by a wrought iron gate. The design was the standard used by the Corps of Engineers, except that the four piers are brick rather than limestone. The remainder of the cemetery is enclosed by chain link fencing. The lodge is located west of the main entrance. The utility building is situated near the northeast corner of the cemetery. A rostrum is located just north of the lodge. There are three additional gates: one west of the lodge and office, which is open to the public; and two others, a service gate east of the lodge and a closed gate near the Confederate section. Graves are marked with upright marble headstones, except for Section L, in which graves are marked with flat granite markers.



The lodge was constructed in 1908. It is a two-story, eight-room brick structure with exposed concrete foundation walls. The roof is fiberglass shingles. In 1936, the rear porch was enclosed to provide an additional room. The front porch was removed in 1937, and a new concrete porch was constructed. This porch was enclosed with brick and glass in 1942. The lodge is now used as the cemetery office. The design of this lodge was the standard for the national cemeteries in the first decade of this century, when many original Meigs lodges were replaced. Because of the time it was built, there are some Arts and Crafts influences.



The concrete block utility building with a fiberglass shingle roof was constructed in 1997. It is located near the northeastern corner of the cemetery.

The rostrum, 20 feet by 14 feet, 4 inches, was constructed in 1939. The walls are Bedford limestone, and the roof is copper. The design is Classical Revival.

A brick public restroom building with a metal standing seam roof was constructed in 1998, and is located at the northeast corner of the lodge.

## Noted Burials

There is one Medal of Honor recipient buried in the cemetery: John Hugh Catherwood, Ordinary Seaman, United States Navy. Catherwood died on November 18, 1930, and was originally interred in the Oak Ridge Cemetery, Springfield, Illinois, in 1930. At the request of his family, his remains were moved to Camp Butler and reinterred in Section F, Grave 1, on July 17, 1987. His grave is marked with a special marker inscribed with an enlarged gold-leafed replica of the medal of the United States Navy and the words "MEDAL OF HONOR."

## Civil War Activity in Area

The area of Camp Butler National Cemetery comprises a portion of what was the second largest concentration (training) camp in Illinois during the Civil War. Camp Douglas, south of Chicago on the shore of Lake Michigan, was the largest Illinois training camp.

With the fall of Fort Sumter on April 13, 1861, war between the Government of the United States and the secessionist states became a fact. Demands were made upon the state governments of the North for troops to aid in the war that had begun. Under date of April 15, 1861, Simon Cameron, President Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of War, dispatched the following message to Governor Richard Yates of Illinois: "Call made on you by tonight's mail for six regiments of militia for immediate service."

The State of Illinois was almost entirely unprepared for this call for troops, there being no available armed and organized militia companies. Continuing demands for troops made necessary the establishment of facilities for reception and training of troops. General William T. Sherman was sent to Springfield by the War Department to select a site for such a camp ground, bringing with him a letter to Governor Yates. The governor, being unacquainted with localities near Springfield suitable to the purpose, solicited the aid of Honorable William Butler, State Treasurer of Illinois, and a long-time resident of Springfield. Treasurer Butler, along with General Sherman and O. M. Hatch, a former Illinois Secretary of State, drove by carriage to the vicinity of Riverton, some six miles northeast of Springfield. Their trip resulted in the choice of a training camp site that was to be named Camp Butler. This site was named for Treasurer Butler and was situated on the banks of Clear Lake, a spring-fed pond nearly 3/4 mile long and 1/4 mile wide. The land chosen had high ground for camping purposes and lower and more level ground for drill and training, as well as space for a cemetery. The Sangamon River was in close proximity, and the Wabash Railroad was conveniently located nearby. The camp was considered to be far enough from the city of Springfield to render it easier to prevent dissipation and violation of discipline.

As originally conceived in late July of 1861, Camp Butler was to be the primary center of concentration and training for Union recruits in Illinois, and was intended to replace Camp Yates. Camp Yates was located on the west side of Springfield on the old state fairgrounds but had proven unacceptable because of many complaints of damaged property, stolen poultry, and harassment by drunken soldiers. It was decided to establish Camp Butler in an area much more conducive to the training of large bodies of men and to the maintenance of public order.

The first small units reported on August 3, 1861. Colonel Stephen G. Hicks was in nominal command of the camp until August 12, when Governor Richard Yates appointed Captain Thomas G. Pitcher, the Federal mustering officer for Illinois, commandant of Camp Butler with

the rank of Colonel. The entire camp covered an area of about a mile and a half, into which poured nearly 20,000 men during a five-month period.

Training was usually conducted with sticks instead of muskets because firearms, like uniforms, were in short supply. Because of the critical need for fighting men, the time in Camp Butler was relatively brief, usually only thirty or forty days. Colonel Pitcher would officially muster the men into Federal service and, in only a matter of days, the newly-formed regiment would receive marching orders. By the middle of October 1861, Pitcher was ordered to turn over command of the camp to Lieutenant Charles B. Watson. Pitcher had helped to train and organize more than 16,000 men.

Watson received the rank of Colonel and the camp over which he assumed command began to deteriorate. Governor Yates and Illinois military officials sought Washington's permission to close all the state's temporary camps and to centralize all training at Camp Butler and Camp Douglas. Officials felt that Camp Butler should be located closer to a rail line to permit easy movement of men and material. The new site, called Lincoln Barracks, was about six miles from Springfield. Work began in November and on December 27, Thomas G. Allen, the camp's new commander, moved his men to their winter quarters. Adjutant General Fuller ordered the consolidation of regiments that had to be filled. Colonel Pitcairn Morrison was sent by the War Department to consolidate recruiting and training. He had taken command of Camp Butler on January 31, 1862. By early February 1862, only a few troops remained and on February 22, 2,000 out of 15,000 Rebels captured at Fort Donelson were escorted into camp. On April 13, Morrison's task was further complicated by the arrival of over 1,000 more Confederates captured at Island No. 10, located in the great bend of the Mississippi River at the juncture of Missouri, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Many prisoners escaped and many became ill. Hardly a day passed without the removal of four or five bodies from the prison hospital wards (also called the "dead house").

Colonel Morrison was relieved of his duties on June 22, and his replacement was Major John G. Fonda. An enormous recruitment followed, and Governor Yates opened temporary camps throughout the state. Camp Butler and Camp Douglas remained the primary training sites. Colonel Fonda later became the new commander of the 118th Illinois Infantry, and Colonel William F. Lynch was appointed commandant of Camp Butler. In January 1863, 1,665 Confederates captured at Arkansas Post and Murfreesboro were on their way to Springfield, and 500 additional men arrived during the next two months. The camp was not prepared for such an influx of prisoners. Supplies were slow in coming and weather conditions were deplorable. Many prisoners came down with pneumonia and smallpox claimed a number of victims, forcing the creation of a separate hospital in a building outside the stockade. Lynch was then ordered to prepare the prisoners for exchange. By May 19, 1,834 were on their way to City Point, Virginia.

Illinois had until January 5, 1864, to meet its quota of 19,771 men before a draft would be forced upon the state. As Governor Yates rushed to meet the quota, hundreds of men drilled at Camp Butler and were mustered into service. Throughout the first three months of 1864, Camp Butler housed several thousand new recruits and returning veterans. A revised date of February 2 was set for the states to meet their quotas. Illinois was required to provide 34,046 men by March 1 or face a draft. The new call guaranteed that Camp Butler would remain active throughout the spring. On July 18, President Lincoln issued another call for 500,000 more men to serve for a period of one to three years. The quota for Illinois was 16,182 men by September 5, or a

draft would be imposed upon the state. In order to promote enlistments, Governor Yates was able to get approval for one new regiment, mainly composed of re-enlisting veterans, that was to serve for one year. On December 19, Lincoln called for 300,000 men to serve for one to three years, and the quota for Illinois was 32,892 additional men. The state failed to meet its quota, and a draft was called for February 11, 1865.

A month after the last Illinois regiment left Camp Butler, Union forces entered Richmond, and General Robert E. Lee began his final retreat toward Appomattox Court House. On April 14, only a few hours before President Lincoln was shot, orders were received to stop recruiting troops.

Camp Butler remained active even when the war was nearly over. In addition to recruits waiting to be sent to their regiments, there were problems of demobilization and the caring for the sick and wounded as they returned home.

On May 4, 1865, the train bearing President Abraham Lincoln's body arrived in Springfield, and men from Camp Butler were assigned as a guard of honor for the funeral and later as sentries at the gravesite.

The War Department did not start to release regiments from active service until the end of May, and it took several more weeks before they could be transported to Camp Butler for their final pay and release from the Army. The bulk of the regiments came to camp in July and August, and by mid-September, most troops had returned to the state. Early in September, Camp Douglas was discontinued as a rendezvous center, and Camp Butler was the state's only remaining center for rendezvous. On June 18, 1866, the last Illinois regiment received its pay and left for home, and on June 19, Camp Butler was formally closed as a military rendezvous. Of all the rendezvous centers within the state, Camp Butler handled the largest number of men, for nearly 200,000 passed through the encampment during its existence.

In October, Governor Oglesby requested repair funds from the War Department and suggested that a new hospital be built closer to Springfield. The War Department agreed to the repairs, but the Surgeon General ordered the hospital closed, and the 221 patients were to be transferred to the regimental hospitals within the camp.

The following verse, which appeared in the Illinois State Journal on October 14, 1862, describes the bustling war-time activity at Camp Butler. Written in acrostic fashion, the first letters of each line spell out the words "Camp Butler."

Camp Butler, what a busy hive  
A nest of humans all alive  
Men of all minds make up the nest  
Posted on sciences the best  
Boys here are found that are not wise  
Until they are they will not rise  
The bulk exceed the rural masses  
Let some deny we have all classes  
Evil and good, foolish and wise  
Rebellion though, they all despise"

Most of the land on which the stockade and the west camp stood was returned to crop land or occupied by a few private residences. Part of the south camp and its adjacent drill fields are now part of Roselawn Cemetery. All that remains of Camp Butler is the national cemetery.